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SUBJECT: UNGA: REPORT ON AFRICAN DELEGATIONS AT THE 61ST GA

REF: USUN 2853 05

Classified By: Minister-Counselor William Brencick for reasons 1.4 (D)

1.(U) Gerald Scott is serving as Senior Area Advisor for Africa at USUN during the regular session of the General Assembly for the sixth time. These are his personal reflections on African participation as the regular session of the 61st GA draws to a close. (Note that while in the UN context the African Group includes the states of the North African littoral, usage of the term in this cable reflects Ambassador Scott's portfolio which deals only with the African governments falling within the purview of State's Bureau of African Affairs.)

SUMMARY

12. (SBU) The General Assembly presents particular challenges for US interests, not least vis-a-vis the African Group. It is a part of the UN system in which every state has one vote, where group dynamics are particularly powerful, and where what is left of the Non-Aligned Movement/G-77 are energized. Some African delegations are more committed to such an agenda than others, but all feel the pressure to conform, knowing that advancement of their own candidates or issues will be facilitated or hobbled by their adherence to the party line.

We, on the other hand, mostly argue that issues deserve to be considered on their own merits, and imply that here is one forum in which a government can to some degree reciprocate the favors received from the USG.

13. (SBU) The AF record in the GA up to this point (Dec. 15) has been a slight improvement on that of last year. We received solid support from a large number of delegations in our successful effort to block Venezuela from the Security Council. While AF delegations voted in slightly larger numbers this year for "no-action motions" to block consideration of country-specific human rights texts, when the drafts themselves came to a vote, there was also a slight improvement in AF support. AF delegations were also very slightly less supportive of anti-Israeli resolutions this year. We failed to gain election of our candidate to the International Law Commission, but Africans appear NOT to have been the weak element in this. On the whole, and in the disappointing context of traditional African performance in the GA, this has not been a bad record.

THE GENERAL DEBATE

4.(SBU) The first two weeks are occupied by speeches providing a statement of the general orientation of a delegation towards GA and world issues. These are generally

delivered by Chiefs of State, Heads of Government or Foreign Ministers. Most are anodyne restatements of the obvious. African speeches, with rare exceptions, underline the need for more efforts towards economic and social development, and more attention to African crisis points. Some reference is generally made to other areas of concern, e.g., the Middle East.

5.(U) Direct criticism of a member state is almost always avoided, so when it occurs in this context it should not pass unremarked. We were attacked by name twice. President Mugabe of Zimbabwe referred to "negative forces... bent on subverting the democratically expressed will of the majority of our citizens and to unconstitutionally effect regime change." In his delivered version, unpublished in the distributed text, he continued, "No one from Washington or London has the right to take the key to regime change." "Those who want regime change are those yesterday we fought against." The Eritrean representative, the Minister of Health, blamed the USG almost entirely for Ethiopia's refusal to demarcate the boundary as determined by the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission.

6.(U) Our policy towards Cuba was criticized by Namibian President Pohamba, but this year (unlike his speech last year) he did not mention us by name.

7.(U) On the other hand, we were praised by Burundi (for access to AGOA), by Cameroon (for support of the implementation of the ICJ decision on Bakassi), by the CAR (for our efforts to contain the effects of the conflict in Sudan), and by Liberia.

BLOCKING VENEZUELA'S ELECTION TO THE UNSC

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8.(SBU) Our most important objective in this GA was to block Venezuela's election to the Security Council. We were therefore happy to support Guatemala through most of the process which began on Oct. 16th and ended on Nov. 7th after both Guatemala and Venezuela had withdrawn in favor of Panama; the latter duly elected on the 48th ballot.

9.(C) Since it was a secret ballot, we cannot be entirely sure of the African votes -- and, clearly, Guatemala had more pledges than votes as the totals were announced. (This was doubtless true for Venezuela as well; we generally discount the pledges in these contexts by up to 30 per cent.) I believe that most of the African delegations voted for Guatemala and thus preserved our blocking position. (Guatemala was ahead in all the votes, but never by the requisite two-thirds majority present and voting.) However, there were some indications give me to believe supported Venezuela: The Gambia, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Zimbabwe; probably Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia; doubtless a few others whose tracks remained covered. Strong advocates for Guatemala were Ghana, Uganda, Sierra Leone. It is doubtful we would have been able to block Venezuela had President Chavez not directly attacked President Bush in the General Debate in language that many not otherwise inclined towards us found unacceptable. His language and the presumption that such rhetoric would carry over to the Security Council were our best arguments against him. The ultimate election of Panama, the compromise candidate selected by GRULAC when 47 rounds of voting had exhausted everyone's patience, was an undeserved misfortune for Guatemala who had inscribed her candidacy long before Venezuela. But it achieved our immediate aim.

HUMAN RIGHTS TEXTS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

10.(SBU) The more radical African delegations argue strongly against country-specific human rights resolutions: the texts are said to be "unhelpful," do not engage the sinning countries in "dialogue," and now that the Human Rights

Council is up and running, the Third Committee and the GA are no longer the place for such debates. Some Africans here will admit in private that, while they personally agree with our arguments, their real hesitation is the fear that their countries are only a coup away from being the object of such organized opprobrium. But so long as the draft is not aimed at a fellow African, many will consider themselves free of any obligation to oppose country-specific resolutions, and some will even support them -- as was the case in this GA. There remains the trap of the "no-action motion," a motion to adjourn debate on an item, which, if it carries, ends any further discussion or possibility of a vote. Here, many Africans who might not oppose a country-specific text will vote for the no-action motion with the specious argument that it is a "procedural" motion that does not commit them on one side or the other of the substance of the matter.

11.(SBU) This year there were no country-specific texts aimed at Sudan or Zimbabwe, so that stimulus to African opposition was absent. Instead, the US supported five country-specific resolutions: against Belarus, Uzbekistan, Iran, the DPRK and Burma. First up, Uzbekistan was defeated by a no-action motion. But the resolutions on the DPRK, Iran, Burma and Belarus all passed in Third Committee, having narrowly survived no-action motions. We then faced a retaliatory Belarus text, cleverly drafted, on the Situation of Democracy and H. R. in the United States. -- which was defeated 6 - 114 - 45 (a discomfoting number of abstentions). The AF vote was 0 - 14 - 21 and 13 not participating. Posts will have received by unclas e-mail a full report on these votes. However, I note the positive votes on the DPRK text (our priority) of Comoros, Ghana, G-Bissau and Malawi. Burundi supported the Iran and Burma texts. Mauritius supported the Burma text. In reviewing these votes, it is useful to remember that historically the best one can generally hope for is an abstention on a country-specific text; it marks a general vague agreement with the text and a refusal to follow the AU/NAM line calling for a NO vote. So an abstention (or an absence) on such texts is a favorable step -- at least, in the Africa-group context.

ANTI-ISRAELI RESOLUTIONS

12.(U) Annually we face a plethora of anti-Israeli resolutions. These pass overwhelmingly, but we try to reduce the margin by which they are approved. We concentrate our

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lobbying effort on three of these:

The resolution on The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People passed in Plenary 101 - 7 (US) - 62. The AF vote was 30 - 0 - 3 and 15 not participating. The helpful abstentions were Cameroon, Malawi, and Uganda.

The resolution on the Division for Palestinian Rights passed in Plenary 101 - 7 (US) - 62. The AF vote was 29 - 0 - 4 - 15. The four abstaining were Burundi, Cameroon, Malawi and Uganda.

The resolution on the Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories passed in Fourth Committee 81 - 8(US) - 79. The AF vote was 25 - 0 - 7 and 16 not participating. The helpful abstentions were Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, CAR, Ethiopia, Swaziland, and Uganda.

RESOLUTIONS ON LEBANON

13.(U) Posts were asked to demarche on two resolutions presented by Cuba in Third Committee on the Situation on Human Rights and Children in Lebanon. Ultimately, only one of these came to a vote: Human Rights Situation Arising From

... Israeli Military Operations in Lebanon. This passed 109 - 7(US) - 59. The AF vote was 34 - 0 - 4 and 10 not participating. The four abstentions were Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Kenya.

ELECTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL LAW COMMISSION

14.(SBU) Posts were asked to solicit support for the election of Michael Matheson to the International Law Commission. In a secret ballot on Nov. 16th, Mr Matheson failed, placing ninth for eight Western seats on the Commission. While it is impossible to be sure, our best estimate is that the African pledges held firm and that the weakness was from the competition in our own regional group.

PERSONAL NOTES ON VARIOUS DELEGATIONS

15.(C) Angola: The PermRep is highly respected, but as first chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission, his leadership was weak and too open to Egyptian influence. Their man in 2nd Committee, Giza Gaspar-Martins, was particularly skillful, worked hard and effectively and looks like someone with the potential to rise quickly from Advisor to something much more significant.

16.(C) Botswana: Ambassador Outlule is one of my better contacts. When our policies coincide, he is active in support of common positions. He took the lead on the issue of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, something that we both opposed.

17.(C) Burundi: Ambassador Ntakirutimana, new and willing to step out of the box and support us on human rights votes. I am not sure that he is a believer in human rights; perhaps more a believer in being seen to help the United States.

18.(C) Cameroon: Ambassador Belinga-Eboutou remains helpful and his delegations voting record is among the best.

19.(C) Cape Verde: a moderate and helpful delegation.

20.(C) Comoros: Tiny staff. The two Ambassadors on the diplomatic list are never here. Charge' Aboud very helpful, even though his new government requires him to be more NAM-conscious than last year. But when I asked for a special effort on the DPRK human rights text, he was one of four who voted with us.

21.(C) Congo: almost entirely absorbed by their Security Council responsibilities.

22.(C) Cote d'Ivoire: Ambassador Djangone'-Bi tells me he is likely to be transferred, perhaps to London. Helpful, though mostly through abstentions and absences.

23.(C) DRC: Ambassador Atoki is helpful, but keeps a low profile.

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24.(C) Djibouti: Ambassador Olhayé is accredited to Washington as well as here (where he is Dean of the African corps). His delegation is helpful behind the scenes, and abstains on many key votes, but does not intend to get out in front in public.

25(C) Eq. Guinea: helpful by not voting.

26.(C) Eritrea: not easy to work with since almost every conversation includes the duty paragraph about our support for Ethiopia in the boundary dispute. Even so, some helpful abstentions from time to time.

27.(C) Ethiopia: A goodish voting record, as before, under a new Ambassador I do not yet really know.

28.(C) The Gambia: Ambassador Grey-Johnson is personable enough, but talks a fairly strong NAM line, presumably a reflection of his government.

29.(C) Ghana: Ambassador Effah-Apenteng, also on the Security Council, is one of the most influential (and helpful) in the Africa Group.

30.(C) Kenya: A new Ambassador; a moderate voting record.

31.(C) Lesotho: Ambassador Maema gets perhaps a C plus. I always think their voting record should be better than it is.

32.(C) Liberia: The new Ambassador Barnes, is very approachable, but he is not willing at this stage to stick his head over the trench line. Lots of absences on the voting sheets. Still, a distinct improvement on his predecessor -- but then, Monrovia sent the money to turn the electricity back on.

33.(C) Madagascar: Moderate voting record; lots of abstentions.

34.(C) Malawi: Helpful votes on the Israeli texts and an Aye on the DPRK human rights text. The new Ambassador and I keep making appointments to meet, and then one of us has to break off.

35.(C) Mauritius: Ambassador Soborun is new, friendly and helpful. He tells me he would be more helpful if instructions permitted. I am inclined to believe him.

36.(C) Namibia: Ambassador Mbuende has to be an improvement on his predecessor, Ambassador Andjaba. But that doesn't say much. Very much tied to the NAM model of behavior. Joined 3 others in voting NO on the DPRK human rights text. However, with Botswana, they took leadership on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

37.(C) Nigeria: Good relations with Ambassador Wali's Mission. We are told that they are exploring the possibility of running for the UNSC next year.

38.(C) Sierra Leone: Ambassador Joe Pemagbi is pleasant and available, but hesitant to act without Freetown's instructions. The presence of the Foreign Minister for both Peace-building Commission meetings reinforced this. Deputy PermRep, Ambassador Allieu Kanu was particularly strong in the 6th (Legal) Committee. Sierra Leone was very pleased with the election of their man, Kingston Rhodes, to the Intl. Civil Service Commission.

39.(C) Senegal: I remain impressed by Ambassador Badji. Their votes on the Middle East are conditioned by his chairmanship of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and by their membership as one of three on the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices. Badji assures me he exercises a moderating influence on the Committee on the Exercise, etc., not that such moderation cuts much ice, since the U.S. objects to the operation in toto.

40.(C) South Africa: They go on the SC in January. Ambassador Kumalo is one of the most active and powerful influences here, generally not to our benefit on NAM/G-77 issues, but his delegation is open to dialogue, even if not much results. First Secretary Andries Oosthuizen caught our eye as an especially able negotiator, intelligent and

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flexible as a lead G-77 representative on economic issues. Strikingly more balanced than other members of his delegation. He is returning to the Foreign Ministry.

41.(C) Swaziland: Ambassador Dlamini has been here just over a year. He is more amenable than his predecessor, so perhaps over time we will shift some of their votes slightly in our direction.

42.(C) Tanzania: Ambassador Mahiga goes off the SC at the end of the year. He is thoughtful and helpful. Deputy PermRep, Ambassador Tuvako Manongi is also highly respected.

43.(C) Togo: Not a good voting record, but Charge Menan, who is personally friendly enough, is leaving after nine years.

44.(C) Uganda: Ambassador Butagira is open and helpful. Personally committed to human rights and constructive diplomacy, he is one of our best contacts here. His deputy, Ambassador Ayebare is also impressive and appears well connected in Kampala. He has also been heavily involved in the Burundi peace talks.

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